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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted of parents' opinions regarding school policies and practices. Approximately 2,400 questionnaires were distributed, and 823 (34.3%) were returned. The results indicated that, for the most part, the parents were satisfied with policies and practices. There is clearly a segment of parents who feel that the school is too permissive in handling behavior problems and that discipline should be strengthened; a smaller group holds an opposite view. Parents seem satisfied with the range of activities available to students; however, they would like to see students participate more. A desire was indicated for more feedback from teachers and administrators about students' progress and, in general, more contact with the school. English, science, guidance and languages are the subjects about which parents were most dissatisfied. Science had the highest percentage of negative responses for a single question--16.2% were dissatisfied with the standard of achievement. (Author/KM)

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RESEARCH REPORT

A Survey of Parents' Opinions Regarding School Policies and Practices at John Oliver Secondary School

December, 1971.

Katherine J. Gilbert
and
E. N. Ellis

Research Report 72-02

TM 002 805

Department of Planning and Evaluation
Board of School Trustees
1595 West 10th Avenue
Vancouver 9, B. C.

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The writer would like to express thanks to the students of John Oliver Secondary School who tallied the responses to many of the questions.

A SURVEY OF PARENTS' OPINIONS REGARDING SCHOOL POLICIES AND PRACTICES AT JOHN OLIVER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Introduction

The findings of this study are the results of a questionnaire sent to parents of John Oliver Secondary School students on November 8, 1971. Approximately 2,400 questionnaires were distributed and 823 (34.3%) were returned.

The questionnaire and a tabulation of the responses are shown in the Appendix. For those questions marked with an "S", only the responses of a random sample of 160 questionnaires are tallied.

Summary of Results

Questions 1 and 2 elicited information of a categorical nature.

The negative responses to question 3 for the sample questionnaires are listed in Table I. Science has the highest percentage of negative responses for "quality of instruction" and "standards of achievement" and Guidance rated highest in negative responses for "course content". For all three areas the percentages are quite similar for all subjects. Music had the lowest percentages of negative responses in all areas. (This finding may, in part, be circumstantial in that Music is elected by students who have a positive regard for it.)

TABLE I: *NEGATIVE RESPONSES MADE BY PARENTS OF JOHN OLIVER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WHEN ASKED ABOUT THEIR SATISFACTION WITH COURSE CONTENT, QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION, AND STANDARDS OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR VARIOUS SUBJECTS

Subject	Number of Parents Dissatisfied with		
	Course Content	Quality of Instruction	Standards of Achievement
English	18 (11.2%)	20 (12.5%)	23 (14.4%)
Science	11 (6.9%)	21 (13.1%)	26 (16.2%)
Guidance	24 (15.0%)	18 (11.2%)	15 (9.4%)
Languages	16 (10.0%)	18 (11.2%)	23 (14.4%)
Mathematics	11 (6.9%)	13 (8.1%)	17 (10.6%)
Social Studies	9 (5.6%)	11 (6.9%)	15 (9.4%)
Commerce	8 (5.0%)	8 (5.0%)	9 (5.6%)
P.E.	13 (8.1%)	5 (3.1%)	6 (3.8%)
Home Economics	8 (5.0%)	8 (5.0%)	7 (4.4%)
Art	6 (3.8%)	4 (2.5%)	4 (2.5%)
Industrial Education	4 (2.5%)	4 (2.5%)	3 (1.9%)
Music	4 (2.5%)	3 (1.9%)	3 (1.9%)

*Totals in this and subsequent tables may differ since responses were not made to all questions.

Over half (56.2%) of the parents in the sample were satisfied with the present range of learning activities at John Oliver, but 23% thought a wider choice should be offered.

Parents generally considered one to two hours a reasonable length of time for their children to study on their own each day (47.5% expressed this opinion). However, 30.6% considered two to three hours equitable and 6.2% thought no time should be expected for homework.

Nearly all (90.5%) parents favoured educational field trips for their children, but they disagreed on who should pay for them:

-- 43.1% thought financing should come from public funds, e.g., the school or government
-- 16.9% thought the home or parents should pay for them, and
-- 26.2% thought the cost should be shared.

A large majority (93.0%) favoured having authorities and experts from outside the school come to speak to students.

Nearly two-thirds of the parents (64.3%) approved of allowing secondary students to go to elementary schools during regular school hours to help with the instructional program, but 30.0% were opposed to the idea.

Most parents (88.1%) approved of the use of group discussion in the classroom:

-- 42.5% thought the present amount of group discussion is about right,
-- 42.5% thought there should be more, and
-- 3.1% thought it is presently used too frequently.

The present system of reporting progress four times a year was the most popular:

-- "Four reports per year"	54.9%
-- "Three reports per year"	30.5%
-- "Other"	11.2%

The "other" responses included suggestions that reports be sent "once a month," "every second month," "six times yearly," "twice a year," "only at the end of the school year," and "only when the student is having difficulty." Also, there were respondents who would prefer to receive no reports at all.

For the most part, parents are satisfied with teachers' written comments on report cards; however, one out of five is displeased (70.4% were satisfied; 20.9% were not). The comments taken from the sample clearly indicate that in the parents' opinion the teachers' comments are too vague and too few.

Unfortunately, 54.4% of parents in the sample had not attended a parent-teacher conference. It is curious that people who had not attended a conference oftentimes expressed an opinion on the quality of them. Thirty per cent of parents were satisfied with parent-teacher conferences and 15% were not. Several parents suggested changes in the format of the conferences, i.e., more time allotted, smaller groups, more discussion. Quite a few others thought the conferences to be worthless.

The present means of recognition of students was generally acceptable (75.6% favoured the present methods). The most frequently cited objection was that students should be recognized for effort, not only achievement.

The majority (92.3%) favoured having a counselling service and 58.3% were satisfied with the availability of the counsellors, but one-third were unsatisfied with the availability of the counsellors.

When asked to rank in order of priority the areas in which the counselling services should concentrate, "Educational problems" was first; "Vocational guidance," second; and "Personal problems," third.*

Table II indicates the priorities given each area.

TABLE II: PRIORITIES ASSIGNED BY PARENTS OF JOHN OLIVER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WHEN ASKED: "ON WHICH AREA SHOULD COUNSELLING SERVICES CONCENTRATE?"

Response	PRIORITY			Total	Weighted-Average Priority
	First	Second	Third		
"Educational problems"	81	52	16	149	1.6
"Vocational guidance"	39	51	53	143	2.1
"Personal problems"	33	39	71	143	2.5

*A normalized weighted-average was used to rank the items in questions 18, 20 and 24.

In the main, attendance regulations were acceptable, (82.7% favoured such regulations and 11.5% opposed them). The order of responsibility for attendance was given as: parent, student, teacher, counsellor, and administrator. (See footnote below.) The priorities chosen for each group are shown in Table III. The distinction between parent and student is negligible which could indicate some confusion about the meaning of "responsible". "Responsible" can mean "able to respond", in which case the students would be "responsible" for preparing and delivering themselves to school. It can also mean "accountable" in which case the parents accept primary "responsibility" for their child's attendance. It should also be noted that the question asked who should be responsible for attendance and these responses are based on the ideal situation, rather than on reality.

TABLE III: PRIORITIES ASSIGNED BY PARENTS OF JOHN OLIVER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WHEN ASKED: "WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ATTENDANCE OF THE STUDENT?"

Response	PRIORITY					Total	Weighted-Average Priority
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth		
"Parent"	63	73	9	2	3	150	1.7
"Student"	75	47	12	5	11	150	1.9
"Teacher"	14	19	62	34	17	146	3.1
"Counsellor"	0	3	38	68	33	142	3.9
"Administrator"	7	6	24	32	73	142	4.1

The large majority of parents agreed to have rules governing student behaviour: 92.3% in favour, 3.9% against. Nearly one-half of the parents in the sample (47.5%) thought the present school rules were fair and reasonable, 35.7% believed the rules were not strict enough or too few, and 12.5% thought they were too strict or too many. The discipline of the school was thought to be:

--"just right" by 47.8% of the parents,
--"too permissive" by 30.7%, and
-- "too strict" by 8.5%.

Regarding the formulation of school rules, the following ordering was given: administrators, teachers, counsellors, students and parents. (See previous footnote.)

Table IV indicates the priorities given for each group concerned. There are small but consistent differences in the groups. This ranking offers no substantial change from the present methods employed.

TABLE IV: PRIORITIES ASSIGNED BY PARENTS OF JOHN OLIVER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WHEN ASKED: "WHO SHOULD FORMULATE SCHOOL RULES?"

Response	PRIORITY					Total	Weighted-Average Priority
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth		
"Administrator"	83	13	18	12	19	145	2.1
"Teacher"	27	51	38	18	6	140	2.5
"Counsellor"	15	41	45	31	9	141	2.8
"Student"	23	15	21	30	49	138	3.5
"Parent"	7	22	17	45	52	143	3.8

About one-half of the parents (49.6%) expressed the opinion that there is "just the right amount" of personal freedom for students. Approximately the same number (18%) thought there was "too much" personal freedom as thought there was "too little".

The following statements summarize the results of several questions that were answered with "Yes" or "No".

	YES	NO
Most parents were opposed to the use of corporal punishment. (See question 26, Appendix)	31.1%	58.2%
The majority agreed with sending a disruptive student home. (See question 27, Appendix)	64.8%	28.9%
Most parents found the school administrators reasonably available to them. (See question 28, Appendix)	65.0%	16.2%
About half were satisfied with the present operations of the student council. (See question 29, Appendix)	52.0%	23.3%
The social activities of the school satisfied two-thirds of the parents. (See question 30, Appendix)	67.8%	14.6%
The club activities satisfied nearly three-quarters of the parents. (See question 31, Appendix)	71.4%	8.6%
The cultural activities of the school satisfied the majority of parents. (See question 32, Appendix)	64.2%	10.4%
The program of extra-curricular sports pleased three-quarters of the parents. (See question 33, Appendix)	75.3%	7.4%
Over one-half of the parents favoured the idea of a parent-teacher organization. (See question 34, Appendix)	57.7%	30.6%
A majority said they would not be an active member of a parent-teacher organization. (See question 35, Appendix)	27.6%	51.4%
A larger group believed that minority ethnic groups become involved in school activities. (See question 36, Appendix)	39.2%	29.2%
An "Open House" was favoured by nearly all. (See question 37, Appendix)	89.7%	3.5%
The majority said they would attend an "Open House". (See question 38, Appendix)	85.5%	5.8%
Daily reading of the Bible and recitation of the Lord's Prayer was approved by more than half of the parents. (See question 40, Appendix)	54.0%	35.1%
More parents preferred the traditional ten-month term to a semester system. (See question 41, Appendix)	37.3%	46.3%
An extended school year in which students attend for any three-quarters was opposed by nearly one-half of the parents. (See question 42, Appendix)	36.8%	49.2%

The comments from the sample concerning the operation of the student council indicate that some parents feel it is ineffectual and others feel it provides poor student services, e.g., school pictures, failure to respond to suggestions. Many other parents were unaware of its function.

The parents' comments regarding social activities in the school indicate their desire for more activities with wider scope. Lack of participation on the students' part concerns some parents.

Fifty-eight decimal three per cent thought that the school was "keeping pace with the changes in society," 20.5% believe it is "too slow in abandoning traditional practices," and only 5.1% thought it is becoming "too progressive."

The relative merits of a semester system and the traditional ten-month term evoked a wide variety of comments. Parents indicated students could concentrate better on more subjects under a semester system and could repeat a failed subject in less time. They also noted that retention was poorer on a semester system.

When asked for general comments the responses in the sample seemed concerned largely with the students' community responsibility: some thought the students should be given more freedom and others thought the lack of discipline was appalling. Parents also mentioned concern with teachers' and administrators' poor attitudes towards the students and relationships with them. It was suggested that the results of this survey be made available and that a similar survey be given to the students.

Discussion

The results of this survey indicate that, for the most part, the parents who returned the questionnaire are satisfied with the policies and practices of John Oliver Secondary School.

Clearly, there is a segment of parents who feel that John Oliver is too permissive in the handling of behavioral problems and that discipline should be strengthened. There is also a smaller group which holds an opposite view.

The parents seem satisfied with the range of activities available to their children; however, they would like to see more participation by the students.

The parents indicated a desire for more feedback from the teachers and administrators about their children's progress and, in general, more contact with the school. One parent suggested publication of a bulletin to the parents by the school to keep them abreast of school activities and issues.

There is a definite difference of opinion concerning the semester system. The comments taken from the sample indicate that the parents need to know more about such a system before expressing a preference, because similar comments were made by proponents of a semester system and by their opponents.

English, Science, Guidance and Languages are the subjects about which parents were most dissatisfied. Science had the highest percentage of negative responses for a single question: 16.2% were dissatisfied with the standard of achievement.

APPENDIX

OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL

JOHN OLIVER SECONDARY SCHOOL
530 EAST 41ST AVENUE
VANCOUVER 15, B.C.

November 8, 1971.

Dear Parents:

We are interested in receiving your opinions regarding practices, policies and philosophy of our school.

In order to obtain your ideas we would like you to answer and/or comment on as many of the questions as you can or wish. Please feel free to make comments, - use the back of the pages if you wish.

We are interested only in your ideas, critical or complimentary. Your name is not necessary. Do be honest and frank.

Please have your son/daughter return the completed questionnaire to his/her homeroom teacher.

Sincerely,

C. R. Mitton, Vice-Principal I

B. L. Ferguson, Vice-Principal II

F. L. Burnham, Principal

FLB/af

JOHN OLIVER SECONDARY SCHOOL
Questionnaire to Parents

1	2	3	4
454 (55%)	281 (34%)	42 (5%)	14 (2%)

1. How many of your children attend John Oliver Secondary School? 1. _____

2. In what grades are they enrolled? 2. _____

Grade	8	9	10	11	12
	330	246	231	190	129

S 3. Are you satisfied
with the content of the course,
with the quality of instruction, and
with the standard of achievement in each of the following subjects:

(On the lines below, please respond 'yes' or 'no' or 'undecided' for each subject in your child's program.) Only 'No' responses are tallied.

Subject	Satisfied with the course content?	Satisfied with the quality of instruction?	Satisfied with the standard of achievement?
English	18 (11%)	20 (12%)	23 (14%)
Social Studies	9 (6%)	11 (7%)	15 (9%)
P. E.	13 (8%)	5 (3%)	6 (4%)
Guidance	24 (15%)	18 (11%)	15 (9%)
Mathematics	11 (7%)	13 (8%)	17 (11%)
Science	11 (7%)	21 (13%)	26 (16%)
Languages	16 (10%)	18 (11%)	23 (14%)
Ind. Education	4 (2%)	4 (2%)	3 (2%)
Home Economics	8 (5%)	8 (5%)	7 (4%)
Commerce	8 (5%)	8 (5%)	9 (6%)
Art	6 (4%)	4 (2%)	4 (2%)
Music	4 (2%)	3 (2%)	3 (2%)

S 4. Are you satisfied with the present range of learning activities? (Check one)

Yes	90 (56%)
No, there should be a wider choice	37 (23%)
No, the present offerings are too broad	1 (<1%)
Undecided	22 (14%)

Hours	0	1/2	1-2	2-3	3+
	10	7	76	49	10
	(6%)	(4%)	(48%)	(31%)	(6%)

S 5. How much time each day would you consider reasonable for your son/daughter to study on his/her own at home?

5. _____ hrs.

6. Do you favour having educational field trips?

Yes: 745 (90%)
6. No: 38 (5%)

S 7. Who should cover the cost of field trips?

Public Funds	Home	Shared
69 (43%)	27 (17%)	42 (26%)

7. _____

8. Do you favour having recognized authorities and experts from outside the school come to speak to students?

Yes: 766 (93%)
8. No: 24 (3%)

9. Do you approve allowing secondary students to go to elementary schools during regular school hours to help with the instructional program?

Yes: 529 (64%)
9. No: 247 (30%)

S 10. What is your reaction to group discussion in the classroom? (Check one)

Approval; the present amount is about right.	68 (42%)
Approval; there should be more.	68 (42%)
Approval; but it is presently used too frequently.	5 (3%)
Disapproval; it should be discontinued.	5 (3%)

3	4	Others
251 (30%)	452 (55%)	92 (11%)

11. How many times during the school year would you like to receive reports of the progress of your son/daughter?

11. _____ times

12. Are you satisfied with teachers' written comments on report cards? If not, please explain.

Yes: 579 (70%)
No: 172 (21%)
12. Other: 20 (2%)

Have received no comments but would like them. (4 - 2%)
Comments are too vague and/or too few (22 - 12%)
Comments are unnecessary--grades are sufficient (2 - 1%)

0	1	2	3+
87 (54%)	12 (8%)	14 (9%)	22 (14%)

S 13. In how many parent-teacher conferences have you participated?

13. _____

S 14. Are you satisfied with the parent-teacher conferences? If not, please explain.

14. _____

	Yes	No	Undecided
Conferences are of no value (6 - 4%)	48	24	5
More time should be allotted (4 - 2%)	(30%)	(15%)	(3%)
Arrange smaller groups with more discussion (4 - 2%)			

S 15. Do you favour the present means of recognition of students who have distinguished themselves in academic studies, athletics, art or music activities?

Yes: 121 (76%)
15. No: 13 (8%)

If not, please explain.
Students should be recognized for effort as well as for achievement (3-2%)
Same students are honoured repeatedly. (2-1%)

16. Do you favour having a counselling service for students? — Yes: 760 (92%) / 16. No: 32 (4%)

17. Are you satisfied with the extent to which counsellors are presently available to students and parents? — Yes: 480 (58%) / 17. No: 258 (31%)

S 18. Please rank in order of priority (1, 2, or 3) the areas to which counselling services should be directed.

Educational problems	1
Vocational guidance	2
Personal problems	3

See Table II

19. Do you favour having attendance regulations? — Yes: 681 (83%) / 19. No: 95 (12%)

S 20. Who should be responsible for the attendance of the student?

Please rank in order of priority (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5).

the student	2
the parent	1
the teacher	3
the counsellor	4
the school administrator	5

See Table III

21. Do you favour having rules governing student behaviour? — Yes: 760 (92%) / 21. No: 32 (4%)

S 22. What is your opinion of the present school rules? (Check one)

they are fair and reasonable	76 (48%)
they are too strict	8 (5%)
they are not strict enough	51 (32%)
there are too few	6 (4%)
there are too many	12 (8%)

23. What is your opinion of discipline in the school? (Check one)

just right	393 (48%)
too strict	70 (8%)
too permissive	253 (31%)

S 24. Who should formulate school rules?

Please rank in order of priority (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5).

students	4
teachers	2
counsellors	3
administrators	1
parents	5

See Table IV in Report

25. What is your opinion of the extent of personal freedom for students in the school? (Check one)

just right	408 (50%)
too much	152 (18%)
too little	148 (18%)

26. Do you favour the use of corporal punishment? Yes: 256 (31%) 26. No: 479 (58%)

27. Do you favour sending a disruptive student home? Yes: 533 (65%) 27. No: 238 (29%)

28. Do you find the school administrators reasonably available to you? Yes: 535 (65%) 28. No: 133 (16%)

S 29. Are you satisfied with the present operations of the student council? Yes: 428 (52%) 29. No: 192 (23%)

(Please comment)

Council serves no useful purpose - should be abolished (8%).
Provides poor student services (5.3%).
Provides education in the "system" (2.1%).

S 30. Are you satisfied with the social activities of the school? Yes: 557 (68%) 30. No: 120 (15%)

(Please comment)

Should provide more activities with wider scope (13.8%).
Should try to stimulate participation and interest (5.3%).
Activities are overly concerned with dancing and/or loud bands (3.2%).

S 31. Are you satisfied with the club activities of the school?

31. Yes: 588 (71%)
No: 71 (9%)

(Please comment)

Should stimulate interest and participation (3.2%).
Should involve a wider variety of people (3.2%).

S 32. Are you satisfied with the cultural activities of the school?

32. Yes: 529 (64%)
No: 86 (10%)

(Please comment)

Request more activities of this type (2.1%).
Appreciates the field trips (2.1%)

S 33. Are you satisfied with the program of extra-curricular sports? (Please comment)

33. Yes: 620 (75%)
No: 61 (7%)

Takes too much time - interferes with homework (3.2%).
Should provide activities for people not capable of being chosen for a team (4.2%).
Good for the students (2.1%).

34. Do you favour having a parent-teacher organization?

34. Yes: 475 (58%)
No: 252 (31%)

35. If there were a parent-teacher organization, would you be an active member?

35. Yes: 227 (28%)
No: 423 (51%)

36. Do you believe that ethnic minority groups become sufficiently involved in school activities?

36. Yes: 323 (39%)
No: 240 (29%)

37. Do you favour having an "Open House"?

37. Yes: 738 (90%)
No: 29 (4%)

38. If there were an "Open House", would you attend?

38. Yes: 704 (86%)
No: 48 (6%)

39. What is your assessment of the school? (Check one)

It is keeping pace with the changes in society. 480 (58%)

It is becoming too "progressive". 49 (5%)

It is too slow in abandoning traditional practices. 169 (20%)

40. Do you favour the daily reading of the Bible and recitation of the Lord's Prayer in school?

Yes: 445 (54%)
40. No: 289 (35%)

S 41. Do you favour a semester system of two five-month terms to the traditional one ten-month term? (Please comment)

Yes: 307 (37%)
41. No: 381 (46%)

Can study more subjects and concentrate more on a semester system (11.7%).
Can repeat failed subjects easier or finish earlier on a semester system (8.5%).
Retention is poor on a semester system (4.2%).
Semester systems are boring - students have too few courses (3.2%).
Pace too fast - too much pressure on a semester system (3.2%).

42. Do you favour an extended school year in which the school is open all year and students attend for any three of four quarters?

Yes: 303 (37%)
42. No: 405 (49%)

S 43. Any further comments?

Concerned about permissiveness or vandalism (8.5%).
Should give students more freedom and responsibility (5.3%).
Concerned about teachers' and/or administrators' poor attitudes and relations with students (5.3%).
Should give a similar survey to students and make the results to this one known (4.2%).
Should provide more practical or vocational training (3.2%).